“EVERY DAY!”: A VIEW ON THE CAPITOL HILL AUTONOMOUS ZONE

The Final Straw Radio

The following interview with D, a Black Anarchist who grew up in and around Capitol Hill district in Seattle, talks about that neighborhood and adjacent Central District’s rebelliousness and conflictual history with the Eastern Precinct that the Seattle Police abandoned, about his knowledge of the protests of past weeks and the retreat of cops from their pen. D talks about the foundation of what has been called the Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone, aka CHAZ, aka Capitol Hill Occupation Protest (or CHOP), or as D calls it the Chopped City CHAZ.

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This episode came out during the CHAZ or CHOP, an autonomous zone and occupational protest surrounding a police precinct in Seattle's Capitol Hill neighborhood. The area was opened to community redesign after nights of intense battles with the police leading to the department evacuating the East Precinct to crowds of people chanting "Every Day", meaning they would continue surrounding the police building. In many ways, the ability of the community, including anarchists and other radicals, to be able to respond to the situation was possible because of the mutual aid work that had been being developed during the covid-19 pandemic and years of building relationships.

In this transcription, you'll read a conversation with D. D is a Black Anarchist who grew up in and around Capitol Hill district in Seattle. He talks for this chat about that neighborhood and adjacent Central District's rebelliousness and conflictual history with the Eastern Precinct that the Seattle Police abandoned, about his knowledge of the protests of past weeks and the retreat of cops from their pen. D talks about the foundation of what has been called the Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone, aka CHAZ, aka Capitol Hill Occupation Protest (or CHOP), or as D calls it the Chopped City CHAZ. You'll also hear a tiny bit about the history of occupations during protests in the city, engagement with the zone and indigenous communities in the area, the idea of monolithic Black Leadership, self-defense against the far right, the reproduce-ability of the auonomous zone model and other topics. We're going to try to bring you more stories from this place soon and are super thankful to D for sharing his perspectives.

note: I was informed by my cohost William that in fact the retaining wall in front of the fourth precinct in Minneapolis that I was referring to was actually constructed by the Minneapolis PD, hence why it looks janky as shit.

A few of the resources that D suggests folks pay attention to include Converge Media: **https://www.whereweconverge.com/**

The website for the Duwamish nation is **DuwamishTribe.org**

And for the Suquamish nation's website can be found at **Suquamish.nsn.us**

Political Prisoner Oso Blanco's statement on the CHAZ can be found **at FreeOsoBlanco.Blogspot.Com.**

A few other resources are linked at the episode post found on the Final Straw Radio's website.

TFSR: Would you be able to identify yourself, maybe what political tendency you identify with, your relationship with Seattle's Capitol Hill neighborhood, maybe whatever name and pronouns you prefer?

D: Sure. My Name is D, I use he/him pronouns. I'm a Black anarchist born and raised in Seattle, I grew up at the bottom on the east side of the Capitol Hill so I'm really familiar with the history of the area.

TFSR: Thanks for taking the time to chat, I really appreciate it.

D: Yeah, no problem.

TFSR: So there's this occupation, this autonomous zone that was formed in the Capitol Hill district. Can you talk a little bit about what the protests were like in Seattle following the police murder of George Floyd and other Black folks, and what it looked like in Capitol Hill?

D: It started off with the Friday night protest, the Friday following the burning of the third precinct. I had actually just got back into town and went in not knowing what to expect. It was kind of directionless, some targets were hit that made sense for people, like an Amazon Go store was hit which reflected the sheer hated of Jeff Bezos. Then it was a very confrontational atmosphere in the crowd but also [it was] kind of not knowing what to do or where to go and nightfall happened the demographics of the crowd got very younger and much more Black and there was a newfound energy.

People were going around downtown Seattle and made their way up the hill until like 2am in the morning. The following Saturday were more organized protests that were in the heart of the shopping district in downtown, and before the organized event could really get underway the confrontation with the police occurred and things got really wild throughout the evening. That's where you see the burning cops cars and the Nordstrom's getting hit and the different looting occurring downtown. That Sunday, the next day, there were hundreds and hundreds of people out on Capitol Hill marching around and the cops wouldn't let people downtown. Groups would break off in like groups of 100 and try to find a different way downtown while another group would stay behind at each police line that would be formed.

Over the course of maybe like seven hours people finally made their way downtown in different, smaller groups. Simultaneously with that happening, on the east side of Lake Washington in Bellevue, Bellevue Square Mall got hit and looted with seemingly a coordinated group of people there where the police didn't know how to respond. All they could do was watch a they got hit and looted. I wasn't there for any of that, I have no idea how that even happened or came about. It was cool to hear about.

Then, on the following Monday, somehow the line, the gathering point for the protest and the goal was the East Precinct on Capitol Hill. That's kind of where the siege began and it kind of just stayed there.

TFSR: Can you talk a bit about Capitol Hill: the dynamics in that neighborhood, who all lives there, and what standing conflicts are like with the police? Just to name a reference that I have, I was in Seattle for the protests in '99 and I remember some rad shit happening in that neighborhood. I think that's where there was a RCP bookstore or whatever. There were a lot of marches, a lot of burning dumpsters in the street and I remember the difficulty of transiting between downtown and neighborhoods like that because those roads that go over the highway are really easy choke points to block off for the police.

D: Yeah, I can give you a quick rundown. I want to say it was like in the '50s they got all this funding to build I-5 and they basically cut the side of the hill and built the freeway. In doing so the built these overpasses to get to downtown that you were just talking about, which creates these choke points. I think there's four main ones on Capitol Hill, popular ways, then there's maybe two more a little bit north in what people call the hospital district or Pill Hill. It's a pain because you could go from like one overpass to another and if you have a crowd to take the streets it's kind of hard for the cops to navigate around to get to the choke point. But I feel like they've got really good at spreading out their force and being ready for it and not getting stuck.

The population on Capitol Hill, for me in like the '90s and the late '80s up to the 2000's was a very counterculture scene. Capitol Hill is also on the edge of the historically Black neighborhood so there was always this counter-culture/Black-culture mingling that's existed on Capitol Hill. Grunge came out of there, a lot of punk kids, D.I.Y. people, and the hip-

sters were a really big thing. Especially post '99 the hipsters moved into Capitol Hill a lot, and at that point I think Capitol Hill had cemented it's neighborhood legacy as being like the queer neighborhood. So the hipsters started coming in and started changing a lot of the demographics, it became more hip, more expensive to live on the hill.

TFSR: More white?

D: Yeah, more white, for sure. And even the whiteness changed, it wasn't like counterculture white anymore, it was conformist but like indie. It's kind of hard to describe. I always use this reference of being in New York and going to a talk learning about how the hipster culture was bad and that was the first time I realized what a hipster was. I realized they were the ones destroying Capitol Hill, it was weird to go all the way across the country to get a name for what was happening to my town. Now it's a really interesting demographic because there's definitely a lot of tech money and a lot of single, or young couples. They're very liberal and progressive and from those ranks you get a lot of 'allies,' a lot of people who want to be down, but you also get those who aren't at all. The contest-ability of the neighborhood is lost, or i thought I was lost up until recently.

But it was always known for protests. Occupy was camped out there, a lot of the more confrontational protests post-Ferguson were up there and the East Precinct in particular was the police precinct which oversaw the Central District, which is the historically Black neighborhood so there's a very deep-seated relationship, bad relationship, with the Black community in Seattle and that particular precinct. Like gang unit used to operate out of there, one of the more powerful Black churches is like three blocks away from there. So it's very dynamic but it's a very controlled neighborhood.

TFSR: Can you talk a little bit more about your understanding of who the cops are and where they come from? Like are they folks out of Tacoma, are they out of like Bellevue or other suburbs, or are they people – if you want to call them people – who lived and grew up in Seattle?

D: I don't think any of them grew up in Seattle. I'm probably wrong, there might be a few. A lot of them are from surrounding areas. The cops that I know of what area they live in, most of them are from like Sammamish, which is east of Bellevue, and Bellevue is east of Seattle across the lake,

so like up almost into the mountains and passes there are little towns up there and bougie enclaves up there. I wouldn't be surprised that some of them live as far south as Tacoma or as far north as Everett or even further north, in some of the areas you could get some land, rural areas or whatever. I doubt very few come from Seattle, if any at all. I feel like some of the higher-ups maybe will have their kids in some of the more bougie private high school around, but that's about it.

TFSR: That's a pretty common trajectory in a lot of cities police departments. Particularly if there's concentrations of people of color or communities of color and then you've got a mostly white police force that comes in from the suburbs and has absolutely no connection to their lives that their work has.

D: Yeah, Seattle's interesting. I don't know about other locations regarding this, but I think the cops of color are probably the ones who are most rooted in Seattle or have the most history and relations to Seattle. Where I doubt any of the white officers have any roots in Seattle. And Seattle, they're like cutting edge on shit like community policing and community engagement. So like when Trayvon Martin died there was a Black officer, her name is officer Cookie, she had just taken over a community started chess program. Basically by like getting the library where it was held to not hold it anymore, and then took city funding to start her own chess club in the same place and talked to all the parents and had the kids come to her chess club.

So that had been going on for a few months and then when Trayvon Martin died she took photo ops holding a bag of skittles and an iced tea can and stuff like that. And this is a Black woman. And this is a few years back, and even now it's Carmen Best who's Chief of Police in Seattle, a Black woman who can hit the talking points like "my grandchildren are out in the protest" and "my son/daughter in law is out in the protest" and that type of stuff. But it's there's always been like, even in the neighborhood I grew up with, there was the Black officer who responded to every single call that was every made in the neighborhood. He was the first one there because he was the community liaison and so Seattle's good for that – their community policing's cutting edge.

TFSR: Some people in the listening audience may have heard the term

'community policing' in a positive way as like it's a way to de-escalate situations and to decrease the likelihood of use of force through that way by officers, and cement conversations in neighborhoods or whatever, the smiling face of cops. When in fact it's notably a counterinsurgency method.

D: Yeah, in Seattle it came directly out of Weed & Seed funding. Weed & Seed was a Department of Defense project [transcriber's note – I checked, it's Department of Justice] and it was literally like weed out the bad and seed the good. I experienced that growing up in the '90s, basically it was like they would send these community police officers or whatever into neighborhoods to build relationships with community councils, which were often grassroots organized, and would build these relationships and convince neighbors to snitch on each other. In doing so people, families, lost their homes. They literally get their homes taken away from them because their kids or families members were breaking the law, and they'd be turned in by neighbors. It was a very insidious program. And community policing was not the like you know, I never once played basketball with a cop. But the cop would be sitting there staring at all the kids who were playing basketball at the park nearby and would know whose parents were who so it would make rounding up people easier for them, if anything. It created more divisions in our community if anything. It was insidious but it was also that happy, like shake hands, I'm here for you, here's my direct line, give me a call if you see anything sketchy. Then as new neighbors came in and the gentrification picked up it was the white neighbors who were calling the cops on kids for doing what kids do.

TFSR: Well, to sort of switch gears back to the narrative of what happened in the runup to the police retreat from the east precinct, can you talk about that siege that you mentioned, what that looked like and how that panned out?

D: The police precinct's on an intersection, so it's a corner building. Basically a block down from the precinct the cops set up barricades, basically in every direction and the western barricade is where people gathered first, and they kind of kept gathering. It was pretty amazing, one chant that really stuck out to me was "Every Day" and people chanted it all the time, they would just chant "Every Day." At first it made me chuckle, like, okay, we're not gonna be out here every day. But people just kept coming

and kept staying and they'd be at that barricade which wasn't a super hard barricade, it was like a metal bike rack. People would be there for hours and hours and then the cops would find some excuse or just get worn out or find some excuse and throw like a flash bang or pepper spray people, people would retreat maybe twenty to 100 feet, then you would hear the chant "Every Day" and people would go right back to the front line again. It was that over and over for a few days.

One of the things, the anarchistic intervention in that, there was a call to build a vigil for all the people who had been killed since the uprising started and we built one and it gave the crowd a place to be emotional and process everything. It was about halfway down the block from where that main front was against the police barricade. I would see people leave the crowd, go and kneel in front of these candles and flowers or light a candle and process everything, and then go right back into the crowd. The crowd size would fluctuate, be small in the morning and late at night and then throughout the day it would get bigger and then into the evening it would get really big and more confrontational. It just got to a point where people were sick of the barricade so they removed it. That led to a pitched street battle and the cops pushed the crowd back three blocks but every time they'd try to make a new line you'd hear the can't "Every Day" and people would re-form. It was different for me 'cause I'd never been in a situation like that, it wasn't a march where you were playing cat-and-mouse with the cops. It was like, they'd throw their flash-bangs, people would try and throw them back or try and retreat, and then if you got shrapnel or stuff in your eyes you'd go to the side and you'd get the care that you'd need and then you'd go right back into it.

So they pushed us back like three blocks, then something really strange happened: they started conceding territory, it was like maybe forty-five minutes where they slowly backpedaled all the three blocks they had pushed us. After they had re-established the barricades and got on the other side of the barricades, then it was like we were right back in the same position we had been in for days. Maybe I missed something but over the course of those days people started setting up mutual aid tents because we had a consistent place. So there was a ton of medics everywhere, as soon as someone would be hurt you'd turn around and scream for the medic and they're there instantly, probably already taking care of the person who wounded. There was snacks, there was water, there was people consoling

– like a mental health tent that was set up early on. People were willing to take care of those places and man those places. The medics had a whole area set up and were rotating shifts and were everywhere. So that helped sustain the siege.

The day after we got pushed back those few blocks, the next day when the crowd got pretty substantial and it got to be kind of late but not quite sunset yet, maybe like 7:30, people completely removed the barricades and passed them through the crowd that time, and inched closer and closer to the police. Every time the police would yell a warning over the blowhard it would either be "Fuck the Police," a loud "Boo," or the "Every Day" chant again.

TFSR: [laughter] It's so ominous.

D: Yeah, it was great. A lot of chants I feel like are used to help us rejuvenate our own spirits and keep our own morale up whereas I feel like this "Every Day" thing was like we're going to ruin the morale of the cops. It was a siege. I think it was effective.

Yeah, so that day they get really close to the cops – they're now like a foot away from the cops, the frontline of the crowd. Like directly under the spotlight, directly next to the sound system. There's basically no more room for the cops to give up, no more space that they could relinquish to us. Then they came, and the day before the day before the mayor banned tear gas. I think the police were a little more on edge and trying to be a little more restrained in their tactics. At that point all restraint went out the window, they started using flash-bangs and tear gas. This time the National Guard was actively with them, not just being behind them but actively in their lines and their ranks and they pushed us back down the street and in doing so split the crowd on two sides. Immediately when that happened all the old police barricades got repurposed to protect our flanks and the backside, and I heard that there were other people at the other police barricades that were set up at different areas. We regrouped under the chant of "Every Day," people took care of themselves and were able to maintain the siege even though we were divided a little bit. And that went on I think until two or three in the morning, and then the next day there was all these reports of the cops preparing to abandon and the news was publishing photos of moving trucks, and then the cops ceded

the precinct, they boarded it up and left. I don't think a lot of people realized on the ground was that those barricades we had created in order to protect our flanks and our sides became the boundary of the zone immediately after. It kind of just happened.

I don't many of the anarchists in town were ready for it, or prepared. I don't think many of the activists or the radicals that had been on the street for years were ready or anticipating that by any means. I think it caught a lot of us off guard in the best possible way.

TFSR: Yeah, I don't think we have many examples of something that feels like a success or a win when confronting the police. They basically are out there usually out there to distract us and tire us out or injure us. I have a friend who spent a lot of time in Chile during the uprising there and they were talking about how a lot of people on Turtle Island don't realize this but this is something they saw in so-called Chile, there are bodies in those uniforms and that will tire out and they will give up. They put up this visage of being never ending sources of power and determination and whatever else but ultimately they will tire out and there's more of us than there are of them. It must have been a crazy thing to see like suddenly the footprint of your self-defense became the outline of this little space.

D: Yeah, and the composition of the crowd was like – it's weird because everyone's in masks, so it's even hard to find friends. I think it was also because the crowd had seen what had happened that Saturday when things were on fire and being looted and they saw the precinct burn in Minneapolis and they saw looting occur other places, that there was a level of militancy that didn't necessarily line up with people's political ideology. Like Bernie Bros with gas masks. It was just absurd to see what was going on, how people came, you had like sorority girls in training with like White Claw at the front-line screaming at cops, for the good and the bad that that makes. It was a completely heterogeneous crowd and that might be an understatement. It was so different.

TFSR: I want to ask about what you think about where folks who were there were coming from, and the impacts of cohesion being formed in the neighborhood a little bit later. Since the police actually pulled out their stuff there's a lot of discussion in media like "Are they going to

burn it?" The socialist City Council member was talking about turning it into a community center, there's been a lot of discussion about what would happen and it's been a while now since the space has been there. Can you talk about immediately after the cops had left and the cops realized what had happened how the space transformed? There have been gardens built, right, for instance?

D: Yeah.

Yeah, so initially I wasn't on the ground that morning, I showed up later in the afternoon. But it seemed like people were a little bit unsure what to do and a few people who had been kind of like chosen by the city as "leaders" didn't want it to burn down and other people were unsure if it should burn down or if we should even there the premises. So just like nothing happened. Which the next day kind of made a weird split, the first split between the Chief of Police and the Mayor because the next morning the Chief of Police went out and made a video directly to the rank and file saying that it wasn't her decision to withdraw from the precinct and kind of throwing the Mayor under the bus when talking to her rank and file cops. It seems like they were expecting it to burn down and they were preparing for that because all the press conferences and talking points the next day said that, that they had got word from the FBI that there were plans to burn it down. Weirdly it might have been a strategic advantage to not do it, we're really gonna know the answer to that later, like after this all unfolds.

In terms of the area it was cool to see because there were already mutual aid tents set up, the vigil was set up, the medic tents were set up, people immediately started to use this cop free zone to do what they wanted, and started taking care of each other. The zone is attached to a pretty big park on Capitol Hill, Cal Anderson park, so people immediately started setting up tents on the soccer field that's there. Just past the soccer field there's a small grass hill and people immediately started building a garden that grows every day. Around the garden now a tent city kind of popped up around it, and just past that area is an even bigger grass field and people started woking on that field, growing mushrooms I believe. Then some people planted nut trees along the sides, the full length of the park. Every surface became a canvas, basically. I think on that first day when the zone was established someone came in with white paint and wrote "Black Lives

Matter" really big across the length of the whole block. The next day local artists came and each one got a letter and they did their own art in the letter. It was all local artists who did it for free as far as I know. It's a beautiful sight, you see art everywhere, people helping each other. It continued to grow in that manner to the point where last time I was there, they call themselves the 'No-Cop Co-Op' or something. There were people doing shopping, get toiletries, fresh produce, snacks and water, Gatorade and juice. They were handing out tote bags so people could do their shopping, it was unbelievable. Then directly in front of the precinct was a stage area, sometime there would be a literal stage there and bands performing. It became a place for speak outs and other organized events that continually tried to ground the space in the Black struggle, to make it so that identity was trying to staying there. I think it's yet to be determined if that was a success or not. It definitely became like a tourist attraction on weekends. There's a nightly rotation at the barricades and crews that are doing that, who maintain that.

TFSR: In terms of like the barricades and defense of the space, I've heard about community patrols to stop white supremacists attacks. Can you talk briefly about this fear and say what you can about what security's looked like? Do you have an honest impression of – like, the right wing has all these talking points (and probably a lot of centrists and liberals) about 'lawlessness' and 'violence being created in the space' and I have no sense from out here if that's an on the ground reality or if I just have my ideological perspective that people tend to take care of each other if they have the ability to.

D: One thing I can't stress enough is that the on-the-ground-reality is constantly in flux there, but in terms of your question, the barricades themselves were a response initially to street battle with the cops and then became more fortified, but they're very modular so people can open them up for cars that need to come in for whatever reason. There's no checkpoint, anyone could just walk in. I think the difficulty with that is that the heterogeneous nature of the crowd, there were a lot of liberals and a lot of progressive types who were still very adamant about free speech and so as the right-wingers and the alt-right and the white supremacists have been trickling in to see what's there, confronting them has often leads to a couple of people from the crowd trying to defend their right to be there and their right to free speech, often because they don't understand who these

people are or the history or the violence these people enact. So that's very difficult. I think once you get enough people who know that or are with it they can get them out of the zone, but I've also witnessed some conservatives, maybe not alt-right or people who flirt with that, come to the space and are kind of like disappointed. One person vocalized that they felt lied to by the conservative media and they don't know what to think anymore. Which was very interesting.

It's hard, security, there's different formations that I think if we knew ahead of time what was gonna happen we would have been more organized and maybe politicized those barricades a little bit more. I think again it was like, woah, we were just given this zone, we didn't expect it. But I think because of the history of Seattle and the radical organizing over the last 15 years in that town people kind of fell into natural roles that they knew needed to be done, maybe natural is the wrong word but it just fell into place.

What safety means in that that space is very different in that space than the rest of the city, for sure. I've had multiple like femme bodied people who have mentioned that for them it's harder to actually confront people who are being inappropriate or touching them in that space because they're surrounded by liberals, whereas if they were just on the street they could actually do something. They would actually feel a little bit safer defending themselves, which is interesting. Not having police is a very big thing and I don't think a lot of people who go to that zone are ready to deal with that reality. And it became especially difficult during the weekends when it was such a tourist zone, you'd get a lot of well-off drunk people, or well-off liberals who are coming to see what it's about and don't understand a lot of the politics of the alt-right and the white supremacists factions. There's the video of the armed Black man with his crew running around on the night when we thought some Proud Boys were coming to town. They were kind of behaving like police, they never like physically kicked anyone out but you do have a machismo or a macho culture that's associated with that crew that's problematic. It's hard to describe.

TFSR: It seems like a conversation. I think the way that people keep themselves and their communities safe is imperfect and shifting, and like you said stuff on the ground is shifting. If you've got like a peace police instance, not saying the crew with guns are peace police, where

people are experiencing getting inappropriately touched or getting attention they don't want or they can't just defend themselves and be like "Get out of my space, get out of my business, leave me alone," because you've got liberals who are like "Woah, woah, woah, peace peace!" That's weird.

D: Yeah, everything's strange. I wish there were more conversations about the difference between peace policing and self-defense, and more time and avenues to have those conversations with people. I think most of the people who were really invested in the space were having those conversations but I think the overall appeal as a tourist attraction made it hard to really figure out solutions to these problems.

TFSR: Yeah, it sounds kind of like some sort of Exarchia situation where they have to deal with a bunch of drunk western tourists wandering in and being like, "I hear this is a cop free zone."

D: Yeah, exactly.

TFSR: So at different point's there's been talk of there being demands from the commune or from the autonomous zone. Are you aware of any decision making forum in the neighborhood and if so can you talk a little bit about the process and the makeup of it?

D: There was an attempt, they tried to do a general assembly to help facilitate some kind of way to make decisions and breakout groups so smaller groups could figure out what they wanted to do. It seemed like it was going somewhere after a couple of days, but again just the flux of people all the time made that model really hard to implement and people who were on the ground were making autonomous decisions, the people who were really invested in the space. In terms of the demands it seems like three demands came out of the city of Seattle as a whole, or the communities of Seattle as whole which were: defund the police, fund the communities, and then basically amnesty for all protesters or rioters, so, free 'em all and drop all charges. It seems like 'Defund the Police' is a national call, so it seems that that was really popular, and the idea of funding community police was also really popular. I think a lot of people were down the third demand of amnesty for all but maybe when they talked wouldn't push that line or that would be the one that kind of got left out sometimes.

There was one speak out early on in particular where someone was really attentively listening and compiled a list of I think 19 demands out of the while speak out that's like pretty exhaustive, everything form like free college to like closing the juvenile detention center, no kids in jail anymore, increased diversion plans, defunding the police, I think releasing nonviolent offenders, decriminalizing sex work and all drugs, it's like pretty exhaustive. That's really the only demands I've seen that come out of the zone.

Right now we're in an interesting spot because there are certain people who are working with the city and small businesses and they're working with I think like the Department of Transportation, the Fire Chief and like some of these small businesses nearby and one person from one of these mutual aid tents. They've opened up the zone basically, that's currently underway right now. It seems like they're trying to make it like a pedestrian zone area. They are allowing the garden to still exist, I think the tent city still exists as of now. But these leaders have been picked out of people who have been on the ground. I think they're often picked out in the morning when there are very little people around but I'm not 100% sure about that. To me it's interesting because the city didn't roll in the mayor or the city council or the police, it was like the fire department and the transportation or department of utilities or something, the aspects of the city that people don't have a hostility to naturally, they were the ones that came in and made these negotiations to open it up for emergency vehicles, which is I think for the most part and for the average person a really hard thing to fight against. It's hard to tell the fire department, "No you can't have the street to put out fires," or you don't think of the department of transportation as being, um..

TFSR: ...nefarious.

D: Yeah. Or doing the work of the mayor or the police. So that's happened but it's also increased some people's antagonism again which is great. There are certain barricades that people are trying to keep erected and some people are feeling duped, honestly. They're feeling like they got played by these department heads.

TFSR: Are people staying in conversation about that? It sounds like it, if you're hearing it, people aren't just trowing up their hands and

walking away.

D: Yeah, it's interesting. I feel like the anarchists and other radicals have maybe been a little burnt out and are exhausted to a degree. I've felt this way a bunch, where I'm kind of like "okay, that's the end of that" and then something happens and brings the energy back. So I'm hoping for something like that. The precinct is still there, there's an underground tunnel to the precinct so every once in a while you'll see a cop in the building doing stuff. But figuring out what to do with that building beforehand or making sure it doesn't get back into the hands of the police is a big priority for a lot of the people. The zone is one of these areas where some people are really, really invested with it and are going to hold it down til the last dying breath. Where other people might just be like, so much energy is going to this and our demands aren't really being discussed with the city or leveraged.

TFSR: Well someone could always just like liberate a cement truck or whatever and fill in that tunnel pretty easy. [laughter] I saw pictures of a precinct in Minneapolis that just got a bunch of cinder blocks sealed up in front of the entrance in front of it.

D: That's hilarious.

What's been nice is that here people are like 'how moveable are these things?" Anything in the zone people are like 'we could do with it what we want' which is really cool, that mentality is still there, it's just how the energy turns. I'm personally waiting for the "Every Day" chants again.

TFSR: Weird question but is it CHAZ or CHOP? What's the difference?

D: Uh...man, I'm the wrong person to ask. I'm up for either really, I also just don't really care. The CHAZ thingI think was like a media branding more than anything. I want to say it came out of the Stranger because it sounds like something that they would do. The Stranger is the local, weird independent press that goes in-between being friendly with anarchists to despising anarchists. It seems like a very corporate brands so CHOP was the response to that. I think there's a lot of misconceptions about the CHAZ, the name. So the argument for the CHOP was that it's like Capitol

Hill Occupied Protest is somehow less offensive to the Duwamish people. Which from what I've heard the Duwamish people didn't really care what this area was called. The Duwamish people are one of the indigenous people who were the original caretakers of what is now Seattle. There's another argument I heard where someone tried to say that 'occupied protest' is more part of the Black radical tradition than autonomous zone, but I couldn't follow the logic or history they were presenting. I think part of it was that some people felt like the name CHAZ came from the outside and they just wanted to re-brand it for that reason. Some people talked about CHAZ sounding super white and wanting to re-brand it for that reason. I've been referring to it as Chopped City CHAZ just to kind of like laugh at the name. But yeah, it's interesting. I feel like the name being contested is reflective of the on the ground scene where there's this contact flux and people are having identity problems, I don't want to go as far as to call it a crisis but the space is still trying to figure out what it is.

TFSR: And the people that you – Suquamish, is that what you were saying?

D: That's Suquamish. Duwamish, so yeah, the area of Seattle from the history I know, totally could be wrong, was a shared space from a lot of tribes: Mukilteo, Suquamish, Duwamish, Snohomish, I'm forgetting a bunch probably, maybe the Puyallup. The treaty as far as I know was signed with the Mukilteo people but I could be wrong*. I'm just gonna stop talking about it because I don't want to mess up anything.

The Duwamish people are, the government considers them a part of the Mukilteo tribe but they've been fighting for federal recognition for a long time and they have a longhouse in west Seattle that was actually where the original settlers landed. Oftentimes the opening of an event you would recognize the Duwamish and Suquamish people as the original caretakers of the land. So those are the two that are often recognized as the original caretakers.

TFSR: We had someone come on the show and present an interview that they did with someone from up there who was talking about this community center that I think had an art collective – it was like Rising

**transriber's note – the treaty was signed in Mukilteo by a number of tribes*

Star, I think was the name of the indigenous community space.

D: Was it Daybreak Star?

TFSR: Daybreak Star – yeah, I think so.

D: Yeah, that came out of the occupation of a military base. Seattle has a real strong history of occupations and getting those spaces. So Daybreak Star was one, I forget the name of the organization that runs it now.

TFSR: Daybreak Star Indian Cultural Center...

D: Oh, okay. Then there's El Centro De La Raza which is a Latinx community space that was occupied by Roberto Maestas and his crew back in the day, I dunno the full history very well but they have like a huge building, they have low-income apartments now, the area where it is is kind of a cultural hub for the Beacon Hill neighborhood in South Seattle. And then the Northwest African American Museum (NAAM), it came out of an elementary school building occupation that lasted for years, I think it's still considered the longest occupation in US history minus the government US itself occupying all the territory of whatever. But it was a couple Black people who held down the school building for years and it was weirdly taken away from them and given to another Black group to then create the African American Museum and it has apartments above it. The people who were holding that down in the original occupation have occupied three other buildings in recent history and have been violently removed from them all. But there's a radical history of people occupying stuff, I believe in '99 that was a thing too, there were two or three apartment buildings that got taken over during the WTO thing

TFSR: I didn't hear about that, that's awesome. I'll make sure in the show notes to link to some of these projects and spaces that you're mentioning. I was wondering about the Suquamish folks because the political prisoner Oso Blanco put out a public statement saying there should be coordination and communication with Suquamish folks since it's on occupied territory so it's cool to hear that there is some dialogue and back and forth going on.

D: Yeah, there's a lot of networks in Seattle that have been established over the years and I feel like a lot of those networks have moderate to pretty deep intimate connections with the CHAZ. I think figuring out how to turn that intimacy into a level of accountability is very, very difficult and takes a lot of energy that I think because people are doing so much stuff in this time they're not, I dunno, the capacity isn't all the way there. But I think on the second day of the occupation being established I overheard a phone call with the Duwamish tribe just getting clarification and I haven't checked, they might have already put out their official statement. For the first week at the CHAZ there was drum circles, indigenous people were leading prayer and ceremony throughout the day at different times. It was indigenous people from tribes all around the region. I think there definitely could have been more connection and it could have been done much better but I think, again, people just not expecting this to happen. I think we were a little underprepared for that.

TFSR: Kinda ad hoc.

D: Exactly

TFSR: Well, also, this is all a process, and accountability requires like you said, intimacy and so hopefully if nothing else this is sparking people to deep their relationships with each other and such.

D: Yeah, I really hope so.

TFSR: Well I just have a couple more questions. Rates of infection and death from the COVID-19 pandemic are rising nationally as states "reopen their economies." I know Washington was one of the places hit really hard and really early. People aren't getting public assistance or the assistance they were offered was pretty paltry and ran out, so people are feeling forced to go back to jobs and maybe are in danger of losing their unemployment if they don't. These protests nationwide have been expressing rage and challenging disproportionate rates of death at the hands of police of BIPOC but also have presented a dangerous vector for infection, is a fear that I have. Are people in the sustained spaced of Chopped City CHAZ keeping up harm reductive measures around the pandemic? Cause I know it's easy to be like 'we need to stop Black death in this way' that's a demand that's 400 years old.

D: I think, in terms of conversations I haven't participated in too many besides like a couple of my friends who thought they maybe got exposed and they went and got tested and they found out it was negative so they came out. But there's hand sanitizer everywhere, everyone's wearing masks for the most part, it's hard to maintain social distance but I feel like if you want to step away, people will let you step away if you want to practice it. I was trying to find the numbers particularly for Seattle and it looks like 1% of everyone who's gotten tested who's been at the protest has been infected, so weirdly enough the numbers haven't risen yet, I dunno if that's because of the incubation time, I don't really understand biochemistry very well. I don't really know why.

I think people are taking the measures that they can take. It's been interesting for me to see that now racism is being talked about as public health crisis. So I've been seeing a lot of talking heads from the medical field who are saying like, this COVID thing's a thing but we also have to talk about this as being a public health crisis. I'm curious how that conversation continues to grow.

TFSR: Yeah, absolutely. For me too. I'd heard inklings among activist communities and occasionally public health officials about – I mean, are you referring to rates of infection being higher because of disproportionate access to resources and stressors throughout lifetimes among communities and individuals that are affected by immediate racism?

D: Yeah, and I think also it's like how the medical field itself is governed by white supremacy, so like Black women given birth have a much higher rate of death than white women, or any other category of women. How white supremacy affects the health of Black people and non-white people. I saw someone on I think it was CBS News, a corporate news channel, push back against – I dunno what they're called, the talking heads, journalists – the guy from the medical field was pushing back saying yeah the COVID thing is a crisis, too, but racism as a health crisis has been affecting people for hundreds of years and we should now acknowledge it and talk about it. I think part of it is related to COVID and the disproportionate infection rates among different communities of color, but it's also pushing this conversation to a point where we are talking about white supremacy as a public health crisis beyond just COVID, or Corona.

TFSR: I'm really glad people are digging into the roots of this and bringing it up. So I guess the last thing I was gonna ask was folks have been talking about trying to create autonomous zones following the model of Seattle, and it seems like if I understand the situation was kind of ripe in a lot of really material senses for the CHAZ with a lot of neighborhood unity around hated of the police, police stepping back, momentum from the protests, talk about police abolition, and amidst collective traumas of grieving the murder of Mr Floyd and countless others and on the back of months of the pressures of quarantining in this slow strangulation of capitalism, to create autonomous zones it seems like the means to live, like access to water, food, shelter and a wide shared sentiment of solidarity kind of need there for it to sustain itself. I know Asheville had a very, very short lived attempt a few nights ago at an autonomous zone on auto-zone or whatever. It did not stick, it did not plant roots.

D: Yeah, the solidarity point I think is crucial. The goal was never to build an autonomous zone as much it's its ever a goal to build an autonomous zone. It was a siege, and that's what we got out of it. It definitely wasn't the intention of most people that I know, to manifest an autonomous zone. It was just kind of a siege and I think that's the interesting point, it was a siege and it exhausted that precinct. I haven't got to the point where I can image we have the capability to force a tactical retreat, I just think it was a siege. I think they were just exhausted and I think the chief of police and the mayor were playing a media game, and not really making their decisions based on what was happening on the ground. I could be wrong. I dunno, I'm not in those halls of power. But the "Every Day" thing – that was huge, just people saying they were gonna be here every day and then living up to that.

I was just watching about, I forget where it was in the country, they were setting up tents and camping outside of a precinct. I think that might lead to something. I think the siege tactic was what got us the zone, not any intention to go out and build the zone, if that makes sense.

TFSR: Yeah, . think so. Were there any things I didn't ask about that you have a burning desire to talk about or any other pointers that you think people should take with, or good sources for keeping up on this?

D: Sources for keeping up on it? There's a media outlet called Converge Media, they've been on the front-line live-streaming everything. When we were in to confrontation with the cops they were literally on the front-line filming everything. They're they're whenever the Proud Boys – when a crowd forms around someone, they tend to get really good video and the guy doing the filming asks pretty good questions for the most part. But there's even a couple videos on their YouTube where they find someone new to the zone. It's a Black media outlet, too, but a Black person would come into the zone, really curious and they would meet this person who's filming, his name's like Amari. He would give them a nice tour of the zone, there's like two or three videos where he would do that at different times so you can see how the zone progresses over time.

But just, yeah, keep at it. And the "Every Day" thing, I can't stress how powerful that was. I think just getting people to say they'll be there and then just keep coming back, and keep coming back, and keep coming back. I think for anarchists and other radicals just being smart with their interventions and thoughtful and maybe creative, being prepared for the unexpected and hopefully being able to communicate and move together pretty rapidly. And just recognize face-to-face communication is so much better than any kind of text thread or email chain or signal group, and meeting people where they're at and realizing the people are a little bit more open than they've been in the past to typical anarchist talking points.

TFSR: Actually I did think of another question that I didn't script out, and if you don't want to tackle it it's totally fine. One of the things people had passed for me to bring up, was I had written down 'liberal co-optation' and that kind of felt covered by the talk of the bureaucracies coming in the mornings and looking for representatives to talk about the demands of the community, or sort of chipping away at the edges of it. I don't know if you have any views you want to share about the call for taking Black leadership. I know there's this conflict around this idea of monolithic Black leadership or any kind of community representation and people, like well meaning white folks wanting to be allies or accomplices or whatever word they want to put on it, showing up for things and then in some instances the loudest voice or the voice that has the most amplification from power as it exists, as in institutional power, gaining the mic and directing folks. Do you want to say anything about this?

D: Yes, man, that's a heavy question. I think it's important as a Black anarchists who are up in the city and who has been pretty active mostly for like the last 12 years. I've seen people who I grew up with who regularly sit down and are in a negotiation with the city and other projects like that, specifically Black capitalist milieus and the Black church and a lot of those people who I know intimately, who I grew up with, who are typically positioned to suck the energy from any Black radical uprising or divert the energy into what they're doing. When they abandoned the precinct they came up to me and were very congratulatory, like "Good job, keep it up," things I would never expect to hear from these people. We're all for Black liberation but our understandings of how to get there are in opposition to each other and we both know it, are now saying "Good job." They've been pushed a little more radical or at least is an opening for them to be amenable to these more radical things happening.

I think there's examples of that in some of the discourse between the civil rights movement and the Black Power movement, but I've never experienced that in my lifetime. I think that's something that's important to understand now, that the terrain's different, especially with the recuperative measures from the Black bourgeoisie class or the Black Popular class or whatever you want to call it, and I think for specifically white radicals and white anarchists it's important to understand that these so-called allies are coming out because they saw a precinct burn. In their mind they're saying it's for Floyd, which it may be partly, it may be in their heart. But they're also responding to a precinct burning it's not just the death of black bodies that's bringing people out, it's the action taken by those brave souls in Minneapolis. The discourse is a little different, that's not to say these people have been pushed all the way radical but the conversations in Seattle – early on, it was oh this is kinda like Occupy except all the conversations are good.

TFSR: [laughter]

D: You know, you're not banging your head against some person stuck in their liberal politics or whatever.

TFSR: Or jet fuel burned down the third precinct or whatever.

D: Yeah. I think it's worth nothing that, and it's understanding that the

Black community is definitely not monolithic. Nuance is very important, but people have changed, this has changed people to some degree and it's worth acknowledging that. So even though you might have a past history with a certain group, the dynamics have changed so the conversations are going to be different than they might have been in the past, at least in the context of Seattle. I think in terms of following Black leadership I think you're always going to hit that contradiction like you were saying of the person whose voice is most amplified is probably going to resonate with the same logic of the people who govern over us. So it's going to be difficult to navigate that, but I think there was initially at least, hopefully it's still there, an underlying hostility that's bubbling to the surface. I think things are different, people are different. I think it's important that formations like John Brown Gun club or any anti-fascist formation or any anti white supremacy formation need to be clear about their politics and what they're doing, especially when confronting people who are white supremacists or known fascist. And willing to share simple ideas with people they find around them, like: bring an extra t-shirt and if you do something wearing that shirt get rid of it, no souvenirs. That kind of stuff.

I think people are really open to hearing it if you just tell them. I think one thing we could have done better is help the people we've seen on the ground organize themselves in non-hierarchical ways and faster. I think that would have been very useful. It sucks because it happens but it's an anti-police uprising and it sucks because there are still some liberals who say we need to dialogue with the police. Or will try to become the peace police, but in Seattle there are a lot less than there used to be. I don't know in other places how they're dealing with or facing that. I know personally for me every time I met a Black person who was like,"we need to be peaceful," it was really easy to be like, "You want to abolish the police, right?" and they're like "Well, yeah." To get them to acknowledge that policing is bad in some way, and then to be like "Well, look at Minneapolis. This is what they're doing and their city council is already trying to figure out how to disband the police. So the simple fact is burning a precinct works."

I kept going back to that a lot, in my conversations with Black people. I'm also Black so I don't know how that would work with white people engaging with liberal Black people. I would say maybe don't do, maybe find people whose ideas are resonating with you and figure out how to move together and be effective and safe.

TFSR: I really, really appreciate that. When you said "Burning a precinct works" makes me think of this artist in the Bay Area who, I was still living out there when the Oscar Grant riots were happening. They put out a poster, just black and white stark, this was their style, with a picture of that cop that killed Oscar Grant behind bars. It just said "Riots Work" in big letters on it. This Overton window, shit is shifting like you say, and without people pushing on it it wouldn't shift. Sorry to speak over you.

D: Oh, no, no, you're fine. I was just gonna reiterate what you were saying, like, "Hey, this tactic works" whatever it is. That it's rioting, burning a police precinct, whatever. It's something the state does, the state knows that. I once went to a talk during Occupy times. It was shortly after that May Day that the courthouse got hit, that Niketown and some other businesses got hit, and banks got hit.

TFSR: It was 2012.

D: Yeah, I think it was 2012. I went to a talk and there was this person called Connie Rice who's actually first cousins with Condoleezza Rice, and her job is to basically go to different towns and help them, I dunno if she still does this, but at the time her job was to go to different towns and basically sit in a room with the cops, the fire department, city officials and Uncle Toms and Aunt Sallies and other Black recuperative forces, and explain to them what their job is and how they need to move to recuperate the energy. One of her big lines was "A million dollars of damage," like once a million dollars of damage is hit you have to concede certain efforts and once that point is made it's the job of the Uncle Toms to get involved instantly, to immediately be there with the politicians who are making the concessions. That was her thing, they do that, they know that. They know that at a certain level of damage they have to give concessions, and that if the Uncle Toms and Aunt Sallies are there the concessions can be very minimal, and that's all they need to do to quench the fire, or at least that's all they used to do to quench the fire. But now it's a little different, I think. We could use that on our side, at least, explaining to especially Black and Brown folks, "Hey, look, this tactic works, we get what we need, we could live a better life if this happens." I think specifically anarchists are positions in a way where we can also talk about the repression that comes later and add that to the conversation. I dunno if any of that makes sense.

TFSR: Yeah, absolutely. Well D, thank you very much for taking this time to chat. I really appreciate the candor and you sharing your perspectives. I know you're super busy, I think people will get a lot out of this.

D: Shit, thanks for having me. Also I dunno if you want to cut this or not, I think it's worth maybe trying to reach out to one or two other people because I feel like there are so many perspectives to how this all unfolded.

image from Converge Media/@WWConverge

The Final Straw is a weekly anarchist and anti-authoritarian radio show bringing you voices and ideas from struggle around the world. Since 2010, we've been broadcasting from occupied Tsalagi land in Southern Appalachia (Asheville, NC).

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